

# Augmented Reality

Acts 4:5-12 | 4/22/2018

For the past two years, one of the hottest games on smartphones has been *Pokémon Go*. Players walk the streets like zombies, staring at their phones and hunting for collectible characters. But what are they actually looking at? Well, the world, for starters. Streets, parks, houses and public buildings. The game is tied to real-world landmarks. One man in Massachusetts has been surprised by the number of people who have congregated on his sidewalk and pulled up to his address at odd hours. His home was once a gable-roofed church but is now a Pokémon destination. "Living in an old church means many things," he wrote on Twitter. "Today it means ... Pokémon Go."

He's not the only one. A number of times I have chatted with those hunting Pokémon characters right here at our church. Apparently one of them is located just outside my office. It did give me the opportunity to welcome them and invite them to visit us for something more than Pokémon Go.

His house is real, as is our building, but the Charmanders and Squirtles around it are not. They are Pokémon characters, exotic cartoons who seem to be living in and around churches, houses and other places in the real world. *Pokémon Go* is an example of augmented reality -- the real world, but better. Well, maybe not better, but at least different ... in an interesting way. Augmented reality.

We need to prepare for the fact that the future will be augmented. Facebook already has begun adding camera effects to its apps, letting users overlay objects, animations and filters on their images. In the future, we'll have smart windshields on our cars, projecting information on where we are and where we are heading. Teachers will use augmented reality to give students a virtual tour of the human circulatory system. Smart glasses will be worn by blind people -- glasses that send a video feed to a customer service agent, who will tell the person what's going on around them. In fact, some of these things are already in use! Augmented reality. The real world, but -- in these examples -- better.

Reading the book of Acts, we discover that such augmentation of reality is really nothing new. In the early Christian church, the real world was made better by innovations that were spiritual instead of technological. One day in the city of Jerusalem, the apostles Peter and John encounter a crippled beggar. Peter says to him, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk" (3:6).

The beggar's reality is that he has been lame since birth. Every day he lies on the ground and asks people for money as they enter the temple. But now Peter augments his reality by offering him healing in the name of Jesus. Acts tells us that "jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God" (3:8). From being lame to leaping. This is the real world, but better.

Actually, augmented doesn't do justice to the transformation this lame man experienced. His reality was completely altered! It was more than augmented; he was, to use Pauline language, "a new creation." Unfortunately, this healing upsets the status quo. Not everyone wants you to mess with their reality ... their truth.

The captain of the temple, the priests and the Sadducees come to Peter and John, "much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead" (vv. 1-2). Jerusalem's religious leaders arrest Peter and John and put them in custody. The next day, the high priest and other members of the high-priestly family have these two prisoners stand in front of them, and they ask, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (v. 7). "What is the secret to this transformation?" they want to know.

Peter responds with words that are not entirely his own. Acts tells us that he is helped, guided -- you might say augmented -- by "the Holy Spirit" (v. 8). "Rulers of the people and elders," he says, "let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (vv. 8, 10).

So, exactly what is the secret to augmented reality or a completely new creation? The power of God, seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Jerusalem's leaders are threatened by this new reality that is appearing all around them. They are shocked that their authority is being questioned by these two "uneducated and ordinary men" (v. 13). After all, 5,000 people were converted, a sure sign that something new was happening outside the realm of the religious leaders' control. Five thousand. All of them hungry for a better world.

Peter concludes by saying, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (v. 12). Salvation comes from the power of the name of Jesus Christ, the One whom God raised from the dead, and who still works to save us from sickness, sin and death.

Reality is things as they are. No fantasy. No illusion. No wishful thinking. Augmented reality is things as they should be. Through the power of God, we can move from the world as it is to the world as it should be.

*In reality, there is human effort.* People can cook meals, build houses, write books, deliver medical care, teach children and compose music. Some people can even perform different functions at the same time. "I'm great at multitasking," said one person. "I can waste time, be unproductive and procrastinate all at once." But in augmented reality, the power of the Holy Spirit is the extraordinary add-on. When we open ourselves to the Spirit, our human efforts become part of God's work in the world. We cook meals to feed our hungry neighbors, build houses for the homeless, write books to uplift and inspire, deliver medical care in the developing world, teach children in underserved communities and compose music that glorifies God. What made the words of Peter powerful was that he was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 8). The very same is true for us, when our words and actions are augmented by the Spirit.

*In reality, there is sin.* According to Christian tradition, the seven deadly sins are lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Most of us have committed at least a few. On the back panel of a popular T-shirt, there's a list of these sins with a checkbox next to each of them. At the bottom, someone has written the word "Done!" But in augmented reality, we find forgiveness. On the cross, Jesus took the sins of the world on himself, and died so that we might receive forgiveness and new life. "There is salvation in no one else," said Peter (v. 12). Jesus is the One who saves us from the sins that separate us from God. The powerful name of Jesus is what augments the reality of sin with the even more powerful reality of forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

*In reality, there is death.* "Nothing is certain," said Benjamin Franklin in the 1700s, "but death and taxes." With April 15 now behind us, we are keenly aware of the reality of taxes. But what about death? Death is a requirement, not a suggestion. The death rate is the same that it has always been: one per person. But in God's super-augmented reality, we find eternal life. Jesus overcomes death on the cross, and he overcomes our deaths as well, giving us eternal life. This is an augmented life that is connected to what we know in this world but goes far beyond it. As Saint Augustine said in one of his prayers, "We shall rest and we shall see. We shall see and we shall know. We shall know and we shall love. We shall love and we shall praise. Behold our end which is no end."

Resting, seeing, knowing, loving and praising are all part of the real world. We experience them and understand them. But in everlasting life, they are augmented by the saving power of God, and they connect us to God and to each other for all eternity. They are real, but better.

Such augmented reality is spiritual, not technological. So, let's open our lives, our hearts, our minds and our good works to the power of the Holy Spirit, and see what augmented reality God may have in store for us. I bet it's even better than finding your favorite Pokémon!

*Pastor Keith*